

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## VICE ADMIRAL SCOTT SWIFT COMMANDER, U.S. 7<sup>TH</sup> FLEET

## AMBASSADOR DAN MOZENA

## MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

**DHAKA, BANGLADESH**

**APRIL 7, 2013**

**Ambassador Mozena:** Good afternoon, everybody. I'm really glad to see all of you here.

This is a good, proud moment for me and for U.S. Mission Dhaka because we have the Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet back with us. He's here because he wants to be here, not checking a box or anything else. It's his second time here. He wants to be here because Bangladesh is a country that matters to America for reasons we've discussed before.

You have his bio already so I won't go into any of that, other than to say that it's a very short list of things that he has not done and that he has not commanded.

He's based in Japan. It is not true that he's moving his base to Chittagong, so I will preempt that question. That is not actually going to happen. It couldn't happen.

With those few remarks, Admiral?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

I would just say that if my wife had a decision where my headquarters was located, it might be in Chittagong. She, if I had delayed another month my return to Bangladesh I think there would have been a problem in my home, because my wife had such a wonderful visit here to Dhaka and Chittagong. She was very anxious to return. So both of us are thrilled to be back.

One reason that I wanted to come back is because of the change in leadership of the Bangladesh Navy and I wanted to return and personally commend my good friend Admiral Habib and his promotion.

I am struck at the progress that has been made in particular with the Bangladesh Navy, but I also had the opportunity to visit the Bangladesh Coast Guard as well in the progress that has been made. A very professional and talented force. The standards that they have set for themselves to achieve I think are examples for all of us to follow, including the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. The age of some of the vessels in the Bangladesh Navy is extraordinary, and when you go aboard one of those vessels, I had not had this opportunity the last time I spoke to you. I had not completed my trip to Chittagong yet. But during that trip to Chittagong I was amazed at the quality of maintenance and sustainment of the Bangladesh Navy. It was certainly an example for me and my sailors to follow.

It's one reason why Admiral Haney and Admiral Locklear were so supportive of the Coast Guard vessel Jarvis being committed to Bangladesh. This was a very competitive process. Many navies in the region were interested in receiving this vessel. But because of the strength of the Bangladesh Navy to sustain its force, this was an easy decision for Admiral Haney and Admiral Locklear to make because they knew Jarvis would be well cared for and would be providing value to Bangladesh for the years to come.

This is also a great opportunity to highlight the fact that the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet has been a strong partner to many in the region for a number of years. This year is the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. And unlike the other numbered fleets in the United States Navy, the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet has been constantly forward deployed in the Indo-Pacific region for the whole 70 years of its existence. So I am fond of reminding people in the region and outside the region that we are not the new kids on the block. We have been here for an extended period of time.

When people ask me about the refocus in the Indo-Pacific region and what is the reasoning behind this. Some have attributed the term "pivot" - that this is a pivot back to the Indo-Pacific region. I think this term is inaccurate. If anything, what occurred was a pivot away from the Indo-Pacific region and towards U.S. national interests in the Middle East. This is a return to the status quo.

America has had an interest in the Indo-Pacific region for many many years, and for many years to come. This is the center, the engine of the global economy, this region. And because of that there are U.S. interests here and there is a responsibility that I have as the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Commander to look after those interests. The most active way to look after those interests is to build relationships. Relationships that are built on trust, which means a constant reinforcing of those relationships.

My path has crossed with the leadership of the Bangladesh Navy on multiple occasions just since September, so it was an easy decision to make that it was time for me to return to Bangladesh and in a demonstrative way show that this relationship is so important to the U.S. government and is so important to me as the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Commander.

The other element that I will touch on in closing are the common views. I just had this discussion with Admiral Habib, that one thing that all navies have in common is we are all sailors. We may speak a different national language, but we speak the same language as sailors, as mariners. So it is easy to develop relationships.

Too often we focus on what makes us different. How our views may be different, our national views, whatever it may be. And we lose sight of the fact that the vast majority of our interests are common. The common interests of taking our specialty, our military specialty of security, turning security -- Security for security's sake has little value. The value of security is when it is applied to increase stability. When you have increased stability, what you have is more opportunity for economic growth.

I'll share one story with you. That is that the extraordinary success that the Bangladesh Navy has made. Piracy, law enforcement, criminal acts, these efforts -- law enforcement has reduced piracy and criminal acts in the maritime region around Bangladesh by 70 percent. I'm not sure if you're aware of this statistic. It shows the value that the Bangladesh Navy brings to the Bangladesh people and the Bangladesh government. The people of Bangladesh and the government make an investment in the Bangladesh Navy. They should expect a return on that investment. That return on investment is a 70 percent reduction in piracy and criminal activities in the littorals.

But there's more to the story. As a result of that reduction, insurance rates have gone down by 30 percent. This is a direct dividend that is being returned to the businesses not only within Bangladesh but businesses that are thinking about doing business in Bangladesh but may be a little reluctant because of concerns about security or stability. This is a testament to the great value that a Navy can bring to a nation, to a government.

So I'm very honored to call myself a friend of the Bangladesh Navy and I'm excited about continuing that close relationships under the guidance and counsel of the Ambassador.

So thank you once again for welcoming me here, and my wife, back to Bangladesh. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

**Ambassador Mozena:** I wanted to recap very quickly the schedule. Admiral Swift and his wife arrived in Dhaka yesterday. This morning the day began with his giving a speech at NDC on the topic of maritime security, why that is important in the Indian Ocean and in the Bay of Bengal.

After that he called on the Principal Staff Officer, General Belal; and then called on Admiral Habib, the Chief of Naval Operations; and then after lunch called on Director General Sarwar, Admiral Sarwar, the Director General of the Coast Guard.

Then tomorrow morning he'll fly to Chittagong. He'll go to the Naval Academy. He'll visit the naval base. And the dock yard. All in Chittagong.

Then Tuesday he departs.

**Media:** Thank you, Admiral Swift, for your second visit within seven or eight months. I am sure that what you have already said, apart from that, I am sure that you are going to have some more specific progress between Bangladesh and the U.S. Navy and Marines. But at the same time I also would like to know that since 2011, before that, and again since 2011, Washington is trying to sign an agreement with Bangladesh regarding acquisition for servicing agreement, something like that, for better, stronger relations between the two militaries. Is there any progress on that?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** Let me defer to the Ambassador on answering that question. It's really more appropriate for him.

But I will say as we engage with navies throughout the region, it's no different here in Bangladesh, that we always want to be guided by the policy of the government and the policy of both governments. In this case the Bangladesh government and the U.S. government, and we defer to the Ambassador for guidance as to how the Navy should engage based on those policy agreements.

**Ambassador Mozena:** Thank you very much, Admiral. There are no negotiations for such an agreement. Should Bangladesh want to have an agreement of that nature they can let me know and we can look at it. But no, there are no negotiations.

**Media:** As you know, there is widespread controversy about 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet role in 1971 during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. According to the history as we know, President Nixon ordered the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to move towards Bangladesh to assist the Pakistan Army who was fighting against a joint force of Indian military and Bangladesh freedom fighters. After 32 years of independence, sorry, 42. As the Chief of the same fleet, how do you look at that incident?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** At the incidents in --

**Media:** In 1971.

**Vice Admiral Swift:** I think it's very important, I had a wonderful engagement at the National Defense College, and I'm always supportive of institutions such as this that can study in hindsight incidents like the conflict of 1971 and the responses of various countries that had interests in the region, the response that you referred to from the U.S. government and the decision to send the USS Enterprise Strike Group into the Bay of Bengal.

Hindsight gives us the benefit of a much deeper understanding than trying to look ahead and predict what is the most appropriate action to take. So what you refer to as an action taken by a military force in this case, the Navy, it is very important as an American military officer to always remember that it is our civilian masters who make the decisions about what we do. That's why the freedoms that we enjoy as Americans to vote, to elect that government, are so important. My role is to follow that policy.

The one individual here in Bangladesh today with my presence here, the one individual that represents U.S. interests in any country is the Ambassador. He has a direct line to the President. I don't. I have a military chain of command that I work through.

So what is most important as we take these examples that have been presented to us from an historical perspective and we study the implications of those decisions to better inform the decisions that we make in the future. I've heard this in many of my discussions with my Bangladeshi friends, and the implications of this decision, that it's reflective of how strong our relationship is, that we have this open discussion. This is the kind of discussion that friends have. We talk about those issues that we have with each other. Where if it's just a social dialogue, you talk about the easy things. You talk about the social things.

I don't know if you have brothers and sisters, but my discussions with my brothers and sisters tend to be about those issues that we don't necessarily agree on a hundred percent. I wouldn't qualify myself as a brother of the Bangladesh Navy, but we have a very strong relationship to discuss these types of issues directly.

Thank you.

**Media:** This is [inaudible], I work for NTV, private television.

Admiral Scott Swift, you mentioned that this region, the maritime region, is a center of the global economy. So as the 48<sup>th</sup> Commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, what is new with your strategic and tactical strategy with regards to Bangladesh in boosting trade and economy through this maritime region?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** As you mentioned, there have been a number of commanders that have preceded me, so the challenge of, I would suggest too often a commander thinks that they have to come and invent something new. So I would say what is new is actually old.

The most important thing that I do is build relationships. It is much better to have a dialogue so we have an understanding, as you mentioned, the challenge of 1971. It is much better to build relationships before there is a crisis.

I'll use an example of humanitarian assistance. It would be much better to have a strong relationship, to understand how we can communicate together. What language we would use? What procedures are the same? Are our radios compatible? Can we talk to each other? We've learned this from hard experience. And the great tsunami of 2004, what we found is we came together, brought together by the tsunami, so our response was not as efficient and effective as it could have and probably should have been.

But from that experience you see the investments that the country team is leading with cyclone shelters, with training exercises. So building on those relationships we have a much better understanding of if there's another disaster in Bangladesh, for instance, we will be able to move much more quickly to reduce the loss of life and return Bangladesh to the same stable condition that it was in before the cyclone.

So as the Ambassador pointed out, my residence is in Japan. Japan is the country that I have spent the least amount of time in. I'm traveling constantly to develop relationships, develop a deeper understanding about the region, and hopefully to allow the region to have a deeper understanding about 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet.

So I'm interested in being more inclusive, not exclusive. I want what I think are the most viable solutions which are inclusive solutions, not solutions that have been mandated by the individual with the most force or the most resources, but an inclusive approach to problem solving. And the most important element in developing inclusive solutions is dialogue and understanding.

So I think this is a bit of back to the future. I'm learning from what my predecessors have done and those predecessors that have been most successful are those that have put relationships first.

**Media:** In your opening remarks you mentioned that your focus on the economic growth of the Indo-Pacific corridor, but despite that, there is a perception here that in recent times U.S. is so much involved in the security as well as naval security aspect.

So in the context of that, people feel that there is a changing scenario in Myanmar, as Afghanistan and Pakistan. So you are more interested in the geopolitically import in Bangladesh for your strategic presence. So what is your response in that perception?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** I would have to defer to the Ambassador from a policy perspective. I can answer the question in terms of the maritime perspective. I go back to the example I used, the great success that the Bangladesh Navy and the Bangladesh Coast Guard as well have had in reducing criminal activity and piracy in the maritime regions around Bangladesh.

I want to work myself out of a job. The quickest way to work my way out of a job is to have the navies in the region be as capable as possible in controlling the maritime.

Bangladesh is, if not the largest exporter, the second largest exporter of ready-made garments. Those raw materials that are required by the garment industry to produce those garments are imported as well. It doesn't come from airlift. It comes via sealift.

The maritime is critically important to Bangladesh. Freedom of navigation is critically important to Bangladesh. The norms, internationally accepted norms, standards, rules and laws that govern the international seas are critically important to Bangladesh. They are just as important to the United States.

The United States economy depends on freedom of navigation. In fact I defy you to identify a country that is not critically dependent upon freedom of navigation. This is what my interest is. So I'm interested in facilitating and helping the Bangladesh Navy and the Bangladesh Coast Guard ensure freedom of navigation so the free flow of raw materials, resources, can flow into Bangladesh, and the free flow of manufactured goods can flow out of Bangladesh.

This is what I mean about ensuring the economic prosperity. Take my specialty of security, use security to increase stability, reduce piracy, criminal activity, and from that will come increased economic growth and ensure that the ongoing economic vibrancy that Bangladesh currently enjoys with its phenomenal growth rate.

Thank you.

**Ambassador Mozena:** I would add an additional perspective to that. That is Bangladesh is important in its own right. It's not a question of geopolitical whatever, it's a question of Bangladesh as the seventh largest country in the world. I think that speaks for itself.

**Media:** My question is you are saying about the maritime security and what will be done by the Navy and Coast Guard, but what is the tactics, how the U.S. is planning to cooperate? What aspect the U.S. is going to cooperate to help this Navy and Coast Guard? What is the tactic?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** Think of the Navy as a system.

**Media:** And also addition, is there any plan to long time physical presence in this purpose to be --

**Vice Admiral Swift:** A long time what? Physical presence?

I'll answer the first question.

Think of the Navy as a system. It's the same as a business. It can't be -- If you have a business that delivers packages, you have to have delivery drivers that can deliver the packages; you need vehicles, some way of moving the packages around. And too oftentimes if someone thinks of a business like that, it's just about the delivery process.

You also need a system to maintain those vehicles. You need a system of people to sort boxes, to make sure they get to the right drivers. It's the same with the Navy.

So what I'm interested in, and I think what the Bangladesh Navy is interested as well, is to better understand how to optimize the system that's the Navy. It's not just operations, although that's part of it. But it's also how do you sustain a force as efficiently and effectively as possible.

We have a responsibility to the government that we serve to be good stewards of the tax revenues that are provided for us to provide for the security and stability of the region. This is why our governments invest in navies. So we have a responsibility to be as efficient and effective as possible in utilizing those revenues. Again, I was very struck by the maturity and excellent examples that I saw in Chittagong and how the Bangladesh Navy is doing that.

My wife is here. I think we have a responsibility to look after what is our most important resource in any organization which is our people. She has spent significant time with the spouses of the Bangladesh Navy leadership to better understand what systems the Bangladesh Navy has for caring for the children of sailors, for caring for the spouses of sailors. So there's a

robust exchange that is going back and forth. And my wife learns an awful lot from those exchanges and can in turn apply those lessons and how the United States Navy and the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet takes care of our spouses and our children.

So it's a rich dialogue that occurs as we develop a deep and meaningful relationship with the navies in the region.

Now part of it is tactics, techniques and procedures. It's how do we maintain a coming operating picture. It's how do we develop information and share information within the Bangladesh Navy. It's how do we develop a collaborative and cooperative relationship with the Bangladesh Navy and the Bangladesh Coast Guard. Those are all elements as well, but it's also important to focus on the backdrop, if you will, of what is required to make the Navy successful.

You asked a question of permanent presence in the Bay of Bengal. The reality is this region is too important and it's too vast for one Navy to do on its own. I would say you will not see a permanent presence of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet in the Bay of Bengal. In fact you will not see a permanent presence of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet in any specific area. You will continue to see a general presence of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet throughout the region as you have seen for the last 70 years.

This is about enabling regional navies to look after regional interests, and that is reflective of the reality as the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet can't be everywhere all the time. The area is just too big. As you probably well know, my area of responsibility runs from the North Pole to the South Pole, from the International Date Line to the 68<sup>th</sup> East Meridian. It is a huge area. So it's through collaboration, cooperation and common areas of interest with navies throughout the region that we're able to increase the stability of the region.

Thank you.

**Media:** Welcome to Dhaka once again. It's good to see you.

What I'd like to say is your visit and the visit of other admirals during the past couple of months have centered around the same answers to the questions, not really what we are trying to get at. That doesn't make news for us that way.

So just for news' sake. You said the security point of view. It's security that's in the larger ocean. Do you come across militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan? Because Bangladesh is in a state where we see that there may be intrusion by militants. We see a rise in religious extremism in this country.

So what is your experience in that particular scene? Thank you so much.

**Vice Admiral Swift:** The frank answer to that is largely, no. And this is what the danger is. Because the example that has been demonstrated to us all by the attack in Mumbai is while the incidents may be remote, infrequent, we must always be ready.



So do I cross militants in the maritime? As a rule, no. If I did cross militants in the maritime, I would be quick to communicate with the Navy that is responsible for that region. This is a regional problem or potentially a national problem. And this is not a problem for 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to solve on its own. We must do this in partnership with the countries in the region.

That's another reason that we must develop these relationships to work closely together.

**Media:** [Inaudible]?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** Absolutely. This goes back, you're not going to like the answer, but it goes back to security and stability because the same vectors that militants use, these are the vectors that pirates use on a daily basis, that criminals use on a daily basis. It's the same mechanism of porous borders, that people that are trying to circumvent the established laws of a given country, these are the same gaps and seams that militants or terrorists would use. This is what the daily focus is on. This is the capacity building that we focus on.

My specialty is the maritime, but I know the Ambassador is focused on developing the capacity of the Bangladesh Army and others in assuring that its land borders are better covered and less porous. It's a big, big challenge for a country like Bangladesh, but it's one that I'm committed to, supporting the Ambassador's efforts certainly in the maritime.

I'm not sure if that got you a headline or not.

**Media:** Thank you. Already many questions have been answered. A very small percent, as you said, you are going to hand over the Coast Guard Jarvis to Bangladesh. Would you tell the specific time and when is this going to hand over?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** I'll have to defer on the specific timing. In fact I'm drawing a blank on the date. Do you remember the specific date of the handover?

**Ambassador Mozena:** You're talking about the Jarvis? May 22<sup>nd</sup> will be the official reflagging of the vessel in California, but there will be many many more months of continued outfitting of the vessel and training of the crew. It has a crew of about 150, 160 total.

Right now there are about 20 officers there who have already started training last month. And then the rest of the crew will come after the reflagging. I would anticipate the ship would actually get to Bangladesh November/December time frame. There will be so much training, and along the way they'll be doing training and exercises, and they'll go to Hawaii, I'm sure, and they'll do things there. So it's not a race back to Bangladesh. It's using every opportunity to train and exercise.

**Vice Admiral Swift:** If I can just reinforce, Mr. Ambassador, the date is firm on when the official transfer will happen in California. But what I've committed to the Ambassador and to the Bangladesh Navy, is that I will continue to be a strong partner as we move forward. I prefer to think of this as event based more than time based. We want to ensure that the ship is ready. We want to make sure that the Bangladesh Navy crew is fully trained. And that when Jarvis

arrives in Bangladesh it will be ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the Bangladesh Navy.

This won't end when Jarvis arrives in Bangladesh. I've referred to this as a milestone. And one of many milestones on the journey that I'm anxious to walk together with the Bangladesh Navy. So once Jarvis arrives, our relationship will continue. And I will continue to be a good partner to Admiral Habib and helping him fully integrate this important and very capable platform into the Bangladesh Navy.

**Media:** My question is simple. Do you need any naval or military base in our military territory?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** Let me refer back to a comment that was made by the previous Secretary of Defense, Secretary Panetta. It was mentioned as well by Secretary Gates. It's a term that they say, and Admiral Willard and Admiral Locklear as the PACOM Commanders, the two most recent PACOM Commanders have stressed this over and over again. It is about places, not bases.

The bases that we have established in the Pacific, I think they will continue to endure. But having new bases in the Indo-Pacific region has little value. It's about the presence issue. Will there be a permanent presence in the Bay of Bengal of 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet ships? No. But there will be a consistent return through CARAT exercises, through salvage exercises, through consistent engagement with the Bangladesh Navy, with the Indian Navy. I hope that we begin a similar exercise series with Myanmar. We have the same engagements with Malaysia, with Indonesia, with Singapore, with Australia, Thailand, many others.

To have a base in any one area is counter-productive because as a Navy we are a mobile force. We are moving around all the time. Driven by exercises and engagements. Not by bases. Not by a permanent presence.

**Media:** So no place?

**Vice Admiral Swift:** The term bases, the difference between bases and places. The places are everywhere. They're driven by exercises. It's not in a permanent presence. It's a week or two and then we move to another exercise with another Navy. Sometimes multilateral exercises. Sometimes many navies participate, three, four five, in a given exercise. That's what we mean by the place that an exercise is conducted from the beginning of the exercise to the end of the exercise, and then we move on to another place for a different exercise.

**Media:** Thank you. Admiral Swift, you have mentioned security and stability, but the day you arrived here and the day you will visit Chittagong, our naval base, and all the day, there will be hostile strikes. The day you have here, there is confrontation, politics, in domestic area. There was the long march yesterday. And so many programs, politics and the government, the opposition. How is your response, and how do you see all the situations?

And Ambassador, can I ask this of you, too? Thank you.

**Vice Admiral Swift:** I'll let the Ambassador answer that question, but I will say that democracy is a vehicle for dialogue. From the U.S. Navy perspective it is very important, as I mentioned before, that the military, and from the U.S. model, follow the lead of our political masters. This is clearly a political issue and I would absolutely defer to the Ambassador on any question or any issue that might be domestic in nature. It is inappropriate for the U.S. military to be involved in that in any way except guided by our civilian masters.

**Ambassador Mozena:** Mino, my comment on that I think you might already know, and that is that it's my view that people have the right to peacefully express their views. Other people have the right to peacefully express possibly dissenting views.

I think the magic of Bangladesh is that it's a pluralistic country. It's a moderate and tolerant country. And I hope that the people of Bangladesh will focus their energies on all those things that unite Bangladesh and not the things that divide.

**Vice Admiral Swift:** I made the same comment in September when I was here, and your question struck a chord that reminded me of a statement that I had made. The first thing I would say, I very much appreciate what you do. This is coming from an American perspective. Because part of the dialogue that the Ambassador spoke to comes from a right, an expectation, that as Americans we cherish, and that is freedom of the press. So me speaking with you here today, listening to your questions and answering them, I think is a core element of democracy.

So I greatly appreciate what each one of you does day in and day out in carrying that message to the people of Bangladesh.

**Ambassador Mozena:** I'll just add, while we're adding on things I will just add one more thought in response to Mainul's question. That is, and I've said it before but I feel strongly about it, I'll say it again: Violence is not acceptable. That is not the way to express views.

**Vice Admiral Swift:** I look forward to seeing you all again soon. Maybe in six months.

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